Dennes is a clothing manufacturer, specialising in the design, manufacture and supply of uniforms and work wear. The business was originally founded in London in 1895 as a manufacturer of shirts, but over its 119-year history has developed into the international SME it is today.

Over the last few years, Dennes has targeted two areas for international development – branded uniform design in Africa and clerical sales in the US. Sarah Weston, Sales Manager at H.R. Denne, outlines the opportunities: “In 2012, Dennes was awarded a uniform contract to supply the cabin crew, flight deck, security and ground crew uniform to Arik Air International, currently the largest and most successful airline operating in Nigeria. The contract involved a lengthy design and sampling procedure before reaching approval,” explains Sarah. “We are currently in the process of rolling out this new look across their Domestic and International services based in Lagos, Johannesburg, Heathrow and New York.

“Towards the end of 2012, we received a manufacturing wholesale enquiry from a company in the US looking to source Fairtrade clerical shirts,” continues Sarah. “Dennes became an approved manufacturer with the FLO (Fairtrade labelling organisation) in 2011. Our Fairtrade clerical shirt is 100% organic cotton produced in India and the only available one in the UK market. No one in the US can offer our client a large scale wholesale arrangement of Fairtrade clerical shirts, so we were happy to answer the brief.”

As an SME, Dennes realises the importance of using its existing resources as much as possible when exploiting international markets. Sarah expands on Dennes’ marketing strategy when targeting international markets: “We use our experience and expertise, examples of work we have previously undertaken and provide customer recommendations to market Dennes’ services. We keep all the marketing and research in house. When looking at such a specialist target area, it is not practical to produce thousands of fliers or catalogues.”

After winning the Arik Air contract, Dennes used its new business in Nigeria to showcase its services to other Nigerian airlines. Sarah explains the process: “We needed to get the name of the right people, which with a few phone calls and emails was easily achieved. We put our own document together and sent out some bespoke information packs to the MD’s, Chief Finance Officers and Crew Managers of the 15 other airlines in Nigeria, highlighting our experience. We also included reference to our relationship with the team at Arik Air. They all operate out of the same airport in Lagos, so it was great to be able to provide local references.”

The marketing efforts paid off and 2013 saw Dennes make international sales of over £500,000 for the first time. Out of 16 operating airlines in Nigeria, H.R. Denne now has supply arrangements in place with five of them – over 30% of the Nigerian aviation market.

The positive trend in export of goods overseas has benefited from the introduction of a new operational process. Sarah explains how Dennes’ technological investment has paid off: “Dennes moved to a new ERP (Enterprise Resource Managing) system called Prima in 2013. The new software allows us to manage the entire supply chain from design and planning through to production, warehousing and open accounts. Without doubt, the move has
provided the clarity we needed to improve our supply chain. The system is in place in all our offices: Gatwick, Belfast, Halifax, Jakarta (Indonesia) and Shaoxing (China) with all staff working on it together. Since switching all of our processes over to the new system, we have received nothing but positive feedback from our suppliers and customers; purchase orders are clearer, delivery notes now provide a garments to follow section if applicable and stock reports are instant – real time.”

Rosemary French, Executive Director of the Gatwick Diamond Initiative, says: “H R Denne is an excellent example of a Gatwick Diamond-based company that has increased its turnover through international trade. Dennes has taken a healthy view of steady growth and improvement through investment.”

For more information, visit [www.hrdenne.co.uk](http://www.hrdenne.co.uk)

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